

Elk Neck Park Quest Information Sheet

While enjoying Elk Neck State Park, please feel inspired to follow the Leave No Trace outdoor ethics:

- ◇ *Plan your day ahead and come prepared to get the most out of your trip;*
- ◇ *While hiking and fishing, please stay on the trail or designated fishing area, to help protect wildlife and plants, and to reduce soil erosion;*
- ◇ *Let plants and wildlife be, and leave what you find in nature;*
- ◇ *Be considerate of other park visitors and let nature's sounds prevail;*
- ◇ *Please take all trash with you, including unused bait, and be sure to clean your fish at home.*

Look around to discover the animals and plants that live in the Wapiti Pond ecosystem while you hike and fish to complete your Park Quest.

Bald Eagle

With a wing span of about 7 feet, this massive hawk is the national symbol of the United States. The immature takes 4 years to go from having a dark brown head and tail to the unmistakable adult plumage of white head and tail feathers. Although this bird is a great hunter, you may see it feeding on carrion (dead animals) or even stealing a fish from an Osprey. This once endangered species has made a gradual comeback – there are 5 nesting pairs that live right here at Elk Neck State Park!

Immature



Adult



Osprey

Recognized by the contrasting pattern of dark and white, with a distinct bend at the wrist, the “fish or sea hawk” can be seen hovering over the water hunting for fish. They can spot a fish in the water from up to 130 ft away. Damaging effects of pesticides used in the 1950's and 60's had seriously endangered Osprey populations. They have recovered since, and now inhabit every continent in the world except Antarctica.



Vultures

You may see Turkey or Black Vultures in this region soaring for hours over fields and forests in search of carrion, which they can smell from up to a mile away. These scavengers are very large birds with naked (unfeathered) heads, which help them stay clean while feeding on carcasses. Dead animals may be infected with diseases that would kill other scavengers, but vultures have highly corrosive stomach acid that allows them to safely digest these animals. Vultures also use their corrosive vomit as a defense mechanism when they feel threatened.



Eastern Painted Turtle

These reptiles live in freshwater habitats with soft, muddy bottoms and a lot of aquatic vegetation. They also need plenty of basking sites for sunbathing, to maintain their body temperature. Look closely out on the pond to see if you can spot one. Their shell is smooth, flattened and oval. You may see one or more out on a log, or catch one swimming with its head poking out of the water. They got their name from the hand painted look of the yellow stripes along their head, and the red stripes along their neck, limbs and tail.



Bluegill

This freshwater sunfish got its name from the bright blue edging along the gill rakers, and is also recognized by the black or blue “ear” which is actually an extension of the gill cover (*opercular flap*). Bluegills school in groups of 20-30 fish, eat small invertebrates and very small fish, and are used as bait for larger game fish like catfish and largemouth bass. This tasty fish is very common and easy to catch using just about any bait. They like biting on bright colors, so try using a corn kernel for bait.



Smallmouth Bass

This freshwater sunfish is a popular game fish in North America. It is generally brown or light yellow brown depending on its environment, with red eyes and dark vertical bands along the side. These fish are intolerant of pollution, therefore are good natural indicators of a healthy environment. They eat smaller fish, insects, and crayfish. To catch this fish, use nightcrawlers, minnows, or crayfish. The smallmouth is highly regarded for its fighting ability when hooked, so hang on tightly if you are lucky enough to hook one while fishing Wapiti Pond.



Phragmites

This invasive plant takes over in many habitats. You can't miss it growing along the edge of the Wapiti Pond. Invasive plants like this one out-compete native plants for soil, in turn decreasing native habitat and food for local animals. The Common Reed can grow up to 9 feet tall.



Be sure to check out the Department of Natural Resources website (www.dnr.state.md.us/) for upcoming events at the Elk Neck State Park Nature Center. Join us for programs, youth fishing events and canoe adventures throughout the summer weekends!

For your information:

- Fishing requires a permit unless you are under the age of 16 or 65 and older.
- A fishing license is **not** required on Saturday June 5th, Saturday June 12th and Sunday July 4th.
- To purchase a Maryland fishing license online, go to <https://www3.wildlifelicense.com/md/> or
- Stop by a local license agent to purchase one (<http://dnr.maryland.gov/service/netag2.asp>).
- The money you spend on your fishing license helps protect and conserve our natural resources.
- Don't forget your 2010 Maryland Fishing Guide online:
http://dnr.maryland.gov/fisheries/fishing_guide/2010_MD_Fishing_Guide_Final_LowRes.pdf or pick one up when you purchase your license.

Images

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